Counties (Tidewater)

ACCOMACK (/ACCOMACK)

CHESAPEAKE (/CHESAPEAKE)

HAMPTON (/HAMPTON)

ISLE OF WIGHT (/ISLE-OF-WIGHT)

JAMES CITY (/JAMES-CITY)

NEWPORT NEWS (/NEWPORT-NEWS)

NORFOLK (/NORFOLK)

NORTHAMPTON (/NORTHAMPTON)

POQUOSON (/POQUOSON)

PORTSMOUTH (/PORTSMOUTH)

SUFFOLK (/SUFFOLK)

SURRY (/SURRY)

VIRGINIA BEACH (/VIRGINIA-BEACH)

WILLIAMSBURG (/WILLIAMSBURG)

YORK (/YORK)

# City of Poquoson

**Clapper Rail**, © Rob Bielawski

Poquoson, which touts itself as the "oldest continuously named city in Virginia," is situated at the eastern edge of the Lower Peninsula along the Chesapeake Bay. It shares borders with the City of Hampton and York County, the latter of which it was once a part of. The city encompasses a little more than 78 sq. miles, yet the total land area comes to only a bit over 15 sq. miles, making it among Virginia's smaller cities and offering a testament to the centrality of the water to life here. Poquoson first shows up in the historical record as a mention in a land grant from 1631; it became an incorporated town in 1952 in order to maintain power over its schools, before transitioning to a city in 1975. Along with Manassas Park, this makes it the most recent Virginia municipality to become independent. Unlike neighboring cities in the Hampton Roads area, Poquoson remains sparsely populated and as a result, retains a more rural, small-town character.

In part because of its undeveloped state, birders will find much to like about Poquoson. Its proximity to the Bay makes it a great place to seek out waterbirds, while the extensive saltmarshes in the city host local specialties such as Clapper Rails, Boat-tailed Grackles, and Seaside Sparrows. Undoubtedly, the crown jewel of birding in Poquoson is the area known as Messick Point, located on the eastern edge of the city. This area sits on the Back River, opposite Grandview Beach in Hampton. A large saltmarsh is the predominate feature at Messick, allowing birders to seek a variety of species, including the aforementioned specialties as well as a variety of shorebirds and waders in the appropriate seasons. In winter, Short-eared Owls will often put on a show at dusk. During the spring months, Messick is often one of the first spots where birders can spot returning Royal, Least, and Sandwich Terns. Visible from Messick, Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge is perhaps the largest tract of undisturbed habitat in Poquoson, but unfortunately this area is largely off-limits to birders due to the presence of unexploded ordinance from military testing. Just to the west of Messick, the Thomas Jefferson Rollins Natural Area, also adjacent to the Back River, offers an alternate location for finding much the same suite of species. Elsewhere in the city, the Poquoson Museum offers a relatively short walking trail through mixed habitats, including edges that can be productive in winter. For passerines, the best spot is the Oxford Run Canal Trail, located by the city government complex on the western edge of Poquoson. This short walking trail runs parallel to a canal in mature woodland habitat, providing one of the few publicly accessible spots to seek out interior species including warblers, thrushes, and flycatchers.

Among the more notable records for Poquoson are Roseate Spoonbill, Ross's Goose, American White Pelican, Common Eider, American Avocet, Marbled Godwit, and Red Knot.

—Matt Anthony

## HOTSPOTS

- Messick Point (https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2153527?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec)
- Oxford Run Canal Trail (/poquoson/hotspots/oxford-run-canal-trail)
- Plum Tree Island NWR (restricted access) (https://ebird.org/hotspot/L9379841)
- Poquoson Museum & Learning Garden (https://ebird.org/hotspot/L4004247?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec)
- South Lawson Park (https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5573197?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec)
- Thomas Jefferson Rollins Nature Area (/poquoson/hotspots/thomas-jefferson-rollins-nature-area)
- Weston Cemetery (https://ebird.org/hotspot/L11287334)

## SOURCES


- City of Poquoson. “History.” https://www.ci.poquoson.va.us/271/History (https://www.ci.poquoson.va.us/271/History) (accessed 04-20-2019).
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. “Plum Tree Island National Wildlife Refuge.” https://www.fws.gov/refuge/plum_tree_island/ (https://www.fws.gov/refuge/plum_tree_island/) (accessed 04-20-2019).


RETURN TO COUNTY MAP (/COUNTY-PROFILES)

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